



The Consumer Council

31 March 2010

Considering paying your rates bill by credit card? Read this first...

- The Minister for Finance and Personnel has decided that consumers should be able to pay their rates bill by credit card.
- The Consumer Council is very concerned that consumers who don't have the money to pay their rates bill upfront might pay their bill by credit card to buy themselves some time.
- But people who pay by credit card will be **charged a two per cent handling fee, which on the average rates bill of £750, would be £15**. We think the handling fee seriously undermines the Minister's argument that consumers want to be able to pay by credit card — consumers with a choice are unlikely to choose to pay an extra £15!
- On top of that, consumers that pay by credit card but only make the minimum payment each month could end paying an **extra £600 in interest** and it would **take 12 years to pay off the bill** (based on the average rates bill). We know that fewer consumers are paying off their credit card balances in full now than they were a few years ago and more are only making the minimum monthly payment.
- There are six other ways to pay your rates bill (and you will not be charged a fee by Land and Property Services for paying by any of these methods):
 1. By direct debit (complete the form attached to your bill and return to the address on the form);
 2. Cheque (send in the post to the address on your bill or use the Rates Quickpay at the Post Office or Payzone outlet);

3. Cash (use the Rates Quickpay at the Post Office or Payzone outlet);
4. Debit card (pay online or use the Rates Quickpay at the Post Office or Payzone outlet);
5. Standing order (arrange with your current account provider); and
6. Electronic transfer (arrange with your current account provider using phone or internet banking).

For more information on these ways to pay visit www.nidirect.gov.uk/rates.

- If you feel you have no other choice but to pay a regular household bill by credit card you could be dealing with a debt problem. If you are struggling to make ends meet you can get free, confidential and independent debt advice from these organisations:

- **Advice4debtNI**

Telephone: 0800 9174607

Text: 07797 809218

Email: advice4debtNI@a4e.co.uk

Website: www.advice4debtNI.com

- **AdviceNI**

Telephone: 028 9064 5919

- **Citizens Advice**

Telephone: 028 9023 1120

- **Consumer Credit Counselling Service**

Telephone: 0800 027 4990

Website: www.debtlineni.org

If you have missed mortgage payments or rent, contact:

- **Housing Rights Service**

Telephone: 028 9024 5640

Each of the above organisations have trained professionals who will offer a listening ear and sound advice to help you get things back on track.